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**SPEECH BY THE HONORABLE PRIME MINISTER**

**GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY OF**

**THE 1ST FLOOR MARKET EXTENSION TO THE LABASA MARKET**

**THURSDAY, 14TH AUGUST, 2014**

The Special Administrator, Mr. Vijay Chand, Labasa/Savusavu Council, Management and staff of the Council, Acting Commissioner Northern Division, Government Officials, Distinguished Invited Guests, Market Vendors, ladies and gentlemen. A very good afternoon.

Today is a happy day for all of us and particularly for my Government and the People of the Northern Division, when after all these years of market vendoring in Labasa, at last, we are going to have a 1st floor market extension of the Labasa market for all our lovely women and men vendors.

As part of my Government’s insistence, this 1st floor market extension will be built. At the same time we are very grateful to our Special Administrator, Mr Vijay Chand and his team who will ensure the implementation of the market extension for our vendors.

The Ministry for Local Government has over the 2 years highlighted the plight of rural women and men vendors, in terms of appropriate vendor spaces as they await the opening of the market in the morning. We have often witnessed rural and farming vendors selling on the streets near the market and behind the Macuata Provincial Building.

FACTS:

* Project Title: 1st Floor Market Extension of Labasa Market
* This extension will create of an additional 120 stall spaces.
* Request made in January 2014 by Council under the Ministry of Local Government: Challenge Fund Project
* Previous requests were also done for PSIP 2013 & 2014, but failed due to some reasons.
* The Project Cost will be $500,000
* Project approval was granted on 18th July, 2014 by the Attorney General and Acting Minister for Local Government and signing of grant agreement was done. (However, funds yet to be released).
* A Contractor has been appointed and contract agreement has been signed on 28/07/14 with Azaad Construction Company Ltd. Works commenced 01/08/14. The Construction phase is for 20 weeks that is 5 months.
* And today is the Ground breaking ceremony.

The project supports the drive of the Government’s ‘Look North Policy’ and integrates the central vision and pillar of the Peoples Charter Pillar 8: Reducing Poverty to a Negligible Level by 2015 whereby the project is directed at the grass root farmers and women.

In months to come gone will be the days of those overcrowding and uncomfortable spacing. On one hand we long for the comfortable and secured selling and on the other, we worry about leaving our produce unattended or even overnight. As from tonight, we assure you vendors of an encouraging market vendoring experience even more and the way you do business daily in the market.

I am certain, that the energy generated and the excitement from having a safe and secure environment that will increase the financial returns of your market produce many fold through happy and friendly service. The onus is now on you to increase your produce that will help you to increase your savings to meet your obligations in terms of family groceries, school expenses, as well as extended family functions, community and church soli.

These responsibilities are in the hands of both men and women market vendors. Needless to say, that behind every woman vendor stands a strong supportive man. Together, they generate income for their family needs. Moreover, these women and men also provide a much needed service to the citizens of Labasa and the public at large by providing fresh produce for their sustenance. Without them, the Labasa community will be without cheap fresh and healthy food produce right from the farms. Our men and women market vendors deserve new market facilities to do their business at the market more bearable, healthier, more fulfilling, enjoyable and in an enriching manner.

Indeed, Government is grateful to the Council for their commitment to improve the lives of our rural people. When my Government visits our rural farmers, they noted that the most important issue they are concerned about, apart from infrastructural development, is the facilitation of a comfortable, market vendoring program so that their women are cared for and supported while in Labasa. I am sure that, upon the completion of this project, they will breathing a sigh of relief and we, who are here today are with them all the way.

A project such as this signifies the commitment of true outreach strategies placed by the government to see that people who are economically disadvantaged are given the chance for better and improved selling conditions.

On behalf of the Government, the Ministry of Local Government and the rural men and women vendors, I sincerely thank the Council for this kind gesture in facilitating and monitoring this 1st floor market extension.

With those few words, I would like to officially extend my congratulations to the Council, the business community and market vendors on this ground breaking ceremony.

May God bless Fiji and bless us all.